DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 154 732 HE 010 048

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TITLE Campus Unrest Report.
PUB DATE Dec 70
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Activism; Case Studies; *College Students; Culture Conflict; *Educational Change; Higher Education; State Universities; *Student Alienation; *Student College Relationship; Student Subcultures
IDENTIFIERS *State University of New York Albany

ABSTRACT

An administrative review and evaluation of the student unrest of 1969 on the SUNY campus is reported. Students, faculty, and staff members were contacted for the study, which was undertaken in the summer of 1970. One conclusion is that the nature of campus unrest depends on the interaction between two major factors, each with a host of subcomponents: (1) the strength of the new youth counterculture on campus, with subcultures, and (2) the ability of the institution to adapt to this counterculture. Social institutions such as universities must adapt to the interaction between the old and new cultures. (Author/MSE)

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Campus Unrest Report

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December 10, 1970

Following the disruptions last spring on the Albany campus, a great deal of faculty, student, and administrative introspection, self-criticism, and adjustment took place. Many discussions pointed to a need for some administrative pulse-taking and evaluation in preparation for the fall semester 1970, especially in view of the arrival of President Benezet in July. After several discussions, two approaches were taken: (a) a formal study by Prof. William Brown of the School of Criminal Justice was funded, and (b) three members of the administrative staff and a graduate assistant were asked to undertake an administrative review and evaluation of the events occuring last spring and the outlook for fall 1970.* The latter approach was deemed necessary since it was generally agreed that Professor Brown should not be asked to address himself to specific administrative questions and because it was felt that his study could not be completed during the summer months.

The staff study was conducted from June to mid-August with substantial time devoted to interviews with students and faculty and staff. An effort was made to talk with people with diverse views and backgrounds, but we were naturally limited to persons who were available during the summer months. In all, 20 students, 15 faculty members, and 30 administrators and staff were formally contacted by the project.

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The interviews were conducted in an atmosphere of strict confidence. While many specific comments and suggestions were passed along to appropriate administrators, the persons making the comments and suggestions were not identified (except in those few instances where the persons being interviewed asked to be identified). Interviews focused on the significant issues and unresolved problems facing SUNY Albany as perceived by the students, faculty, and staff members who were interviewed. This produced a long list of problems and issues: external, internal, academic, non-acadmeic, controllable, and uncontrollable. To some extent there were as many views as there were individuals, and many more questions were raised than could be answered. One result of the review was verifying the perceptions, suspicions, and hunches which many persons on campus shared but lacked a means of "reality testing".

The results of the review were presented to a number of persons in the University during the summer and early fall, but no formal report could be prepared at that time. This summary was prepared to let members of the University know what was done to access the events of last year and to better prepare for the academic year 1970-1971. A large problem is that many of the findings are dated. For example, there were many specific suggestions about how the new President and the "administration" might approach the opening of the fall semester with regard to establishing an appropriate atmosphere of cooperation, clarifying responsibilities, taking a stand on the "Princeton Plan", establishing a child care facility, etc. Those interviewed also saw many issues and concerns that are now with us such as the political role of the University, the need for more student participation in the governance and control of the Faculty-Student Association, the inadequacy of the judicial system and

the lack of clear guidelines for resolving jurisdictional questions, tensions between graduate and undergraduate education, the need for a neutral evaluation of S/U grading, our ever present problems of communication and governance, and the problem in determining priorities for allocating scarce resources--money, new positions, new programs, etc.

In addition, the persons interviewed presented a variety of dilemmas and paradoxes. Administrators are urged to make decisions quickly but consult everyone beforehand. For each faculty member who calls for "educational leadership" there is another person calling for an end to centralized decision making and administrative violation of faculty perogatives. There is a need to create a personal educational experience amid increasing faculty/student ratio and budget limitations. While during normal times there are vague complaints about University administration and "bureaucracy", during the crises period last spring there seemed to be too little "bureaucracy", rather than too much since there was just not enough man-power to cope with the events and make the required decisions.

A large number of student subcultures exist on the campus, with varying degrees of coherence and organization. The best organized and advised are those students who identify with the new left, the free university, the strike, etc. A few years ago these students might have been described as alienated, but in the present environment, it is the unorganized and unsophisticated students of the collegiate and vocational subcultures who are showing signs of bitterness and alienation. Moreover, the poor educational climate in the residence halls (aggravated by high population density, drug abuse, thefts, and racial tension) poses other dilemmas.

Increased demands for higher education in the face of limited facilities and services pose an almost insoluble dilemma, especially in the current economic environment.

Prior to 1969, Albany was a comparatively tranquil campus with few activists and even fewer overt protests. While the amount of activism and the number of issues seemed to increase a little each year, protest generally stayed within reasonable proportions. During the spring of 1969, it became apparent that student power, Black power, and anti-war activism were all gaining increased support among Albany students. During 1969-70, the activity was so great that the normal business of the University was disrupted on several occasions. The following events are among those which removed Albany from the ranks of the peaceful: protests over faculty promotion, tenure, and contract renewal decisions leading to the suspension of classes for two days of Dialogue; the Women's Liberation attempts to establish an on-campus Child Care Facility; the conflict between the academic calendar and Jewish Holy Days; drug arrests by local police; smouldering feelings of racism which exploded into fist fights and damage to a dormitory dining hall; a "Peoples' Park" demonstration which attempted to delay construction and landscaping of two court-yards on the academic podium; constant anti-war protests throughout the year, some directed against the University as when the Senate was asked to take an anti-war stand, and some directed outward from the University as when thousands marched downtown from the campus to protest the Cambodia decision and the Kent State Killings; the student strike and disruption of classes which was an aftermath of the Cambodia intervension and the Kent State incident; and at least four Molotov cocktails thrown and eight fires set resulting in $85,000 damage during the tense days in May.

The Albany campus is in a period of transition which has seen great increases in social and academic freedom for students and a virtual

abandonment of the former "in loco parentis" role of the institution. There are now very few social regulations on campus which restrict student behavior, beyond those which exist for the surrounding community. Academically, there are fewer requirements and restrictions and students have greater variety and freedom of choice than ever before. Moreover, student participation in governance has increased to such a great extent that councils and committees are having difficulty finding enough students to fill all the voting membership positions.

In the space of one decade Albany has been transformed in almost every respect: organizational structure, physical facilities, functional complexity, etc. Moreover, the University has developed numerous adaptive mechanisms to cope with Student Protest. The University by its very open and free nature reveals its own obsolences and adapts to this new knowledge. The irony is that its openness and adaptability should make it subject to abuse by some of its own faculty and students. The history of Albany over the last decade belies any accusations of repressiveness or rigidity.

What then are the institutional causes of student unrest at SUNY Albany? The societal and international causes are now well discussed by Seymour Halleck (1968), Kenneth Keniston (1968, 1969), and Edward Sampson (1970), among others. Therefore, the discussion below focuses on those local factors which on the basis of interviews and observation seem to contribute to the dissatisfaction and unrest at Albany. It should be observed that many of these interact and overlap:

1. The sheer rate and magnitude of academic and institutional change must be considered as a major contributor. Were the change more

gradual and more controlled the transition for the institution might not have produced so much dislocation, disorientation, and anomie on the part of both faculty and students.

2. One of the obvious changes is the increasing size of the institution. Large size has produced a less personal method of operation, made communication more difficult, and increased the need for decentralized administration. It is humanly impossible for many students and faculty to share a personal relationship with a dean or a vice president, much less with the President. The organization is so large that the need for formal and structured communication has increased while informal communication is more difficult. Moreover, the number and nature of decisions required means that administration must be decentralized.

3. Another change is the increasing, functional and structural complexity which has hampered governance and communication. Since the University now carries on a number of diverse activities simultaneously, it is difficult for it to act as a community pursuing a common goal. A wide variety of student, faculty, and administrative subcultures have developed which pursue different and at times even conflicting goals. For the faculty's part the situation is best described by one who commented, "The University is a fragile institution which depends for its continued operation on the consent of many groups. And in the past couple of years one group after another has been withdrawing its consent."

In the case of the students, it is clear that in the last few years the various "collegiate" and "vocational" subcultures have become less predominent while the various "intellectual" and "nonconformist" subcultures have become more noticeable. The rapidly changing size and complexity of the institution also produced problems of administration and governance, as well as a vastly different student body and faculty.

4. Problems of administration and governance also contributed to some of the unrest. The transition in administration and the existence of an "interim" President was an important factor. In addition, the President was constrained by the central staff and certain SUNY-wide policies designed to maintain the integrity of the SUNY system during a period of stress.

There have been attempts especially during the past year to decentralize much decision making to the schools and departments. This met with mixed success partly because not all department chairmen and Deans were prepared to accept this responsibility and partly because the governance structures of some schools were not elaborate enough.

The lack of experience of the new University Senate created some uncertainty and adjustments which will continue to a lesser degree in 1970-71. Now that certain policies and methods of operating are standarized, the Senate should function more effectively and efficiently.

5. The changing nature and diversity of the student body constitutes an important factor in the unrest. Albany undergraduates on the whole show an increase in those characteristics which studies have shown to be highly associated with protest and/or activism: Socio-economic status, parents' education, non-vocational academic orientation, urban or downstate background, left political orientation, the number and percent of Black students, interest in the social sciences, and high academic aptitude. In addition, it is generally recognized that each entering freshman class exhibits increasing awareness and sensitivity and has a higher percentage with prior experience in the use of drugs.

Moreover, a growing number of students seem alienated by traditional academic programs and arrive at the University with no goals apart from seeking an environment which will permit them to experiment and develop. Much of the pressure for academic reforms (Pass-Fail, revised undergraduate degree requirements, General College, Free University, etc.) comes from this group of students. Moreover, the actions of some students during the past year tend to support those like Bettelheim (1969) who maintain that, "There are today far too many students in college who essentially have no business there... And since many are not interested in the intellectual adventure, the knowledge which the faculty can convey to them is not what they want. What they do want, essentially, is group therapeutic experiences to help them mature, to be

secure, to find themselves. But since colleges are not mass therapeutic institutions, they dissappoint the students where their greatest need lies.[1]

In addition, a 1969 study[2] shows a sizeable proportion of SUNYA students agreeing with negative statements about college life, and 13% of the sample was classified as "alienated." One might predict increasing unrest with any increase in this percentage.

Perhaps the most outstanding change, however, has been the emergence during 1969-70 of a nucleus of radical leaders or "strategists." In this regard, the New Left Organizing Committee and the Strike Committee have filled the vacuum created by the disappearance of SDS on the campus, and much of the organized protest and flamboyant rhetoric during 1969-70 can be credited to the efforts of this group.

6. If the number of alienated and radical students has risen, so has the number of <u>faculty</u>. By their public statements and writings a few faculty show great feelings of alienation and bitterness and actively support the radical students. These faculty and students who identify with the new left view the University

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[1]Bruno, Bettelheim "The Anatomy of Academic Discontent," <u>Change</u>, May-June 1969, 18-26.

[2]J. Fredericks Volkwein and Joan Roos Egner, "A Study of University Bureaucracy in Relationship to Student Protest, Alienation, and Desires for Participation in Policy Making." U.S. Office of Education Project No. 8-B-069, May, 1970, Chapter 3.

and its curriculum as repressive, repulsive, and punitive.

One of the greatest changes at Albany is the emphasis on public service, research, and graduate training. A problem accompanying the rapid change and increasing complexity and diversity is the apparent lack of loyalty and commitment on the part of some faculty. Many graduate and undergraduate students voice a great deal of dissatisfaction about the number of faculty who are unavailable. This problem is sufficiently widespread that many faculty members are also concerned, "One might cite various examples of the decline of institutional loyalty... developments which suggest that few faculty members have any departmental loyalty or any sense of teaching and scholarship as cooperative enterprises... Scholarship is plentiful these days, but community is in short supply."[3]

7. Finally, a factor contributing to the possibility of unrest at Albany is that both students and faculty have more flexible schedules and more time to devote to activist activities. The recent academic and curricular changes have given most undergraduate students greater freedom (independent study, directed readings, S-U grading, etc.) Moreover, the conditions of employment for faculty members have improved greatly over the last decade and faculty not only teach fewer classes, but also have the assistance of graduate students.

[3]Kendall Birr, "The Crisis of the University", an unpublished paper written in response to the events of 1969-70 at SUNY Albany, June 11, 1970.

The significance of this summary report and the implications of the findings will vary with each reader.[4] A personal theory is that the amount and nature of campus unrest depends upon the interaction between two major factors (each of which has a host of sub-components and inputs):

1. The strength of the new youth counter-culture on a campus (with sub-cultures such as the New Left, the environmentalists, Women's Liberation, Black Power, etc.)
2. The ability of the institution to adapt to this counter-culture.

Social institutions such as universities, must adapt to the interaction between the old and new cultures.

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[4]Many of the above remarks appear in the first draft of the Middle States Self Study.